

**Big Cypress National Preserve
ORV Advisory Committee Meeting
April 27, 2011**

Minutes

The Big Cypress National Preserve (BICY) ORV Advisory Committee held their regular meeting on April 27, 2011, at the Big Cypress Swamp Welcome Center, Ochopee, Florida. The meeting was called to order at 3:30 p.m. by Pedro Ramos, BICY Superintendent.

Committee Members Present: Franklin Adams, Manley Fuller, John Adornato, Karl Greer, Robin Barnes, Jorge Gutierrez, Jim Coletta, Chuck Hampton, Brad Cornell, Wayne Jenkins, David Denham, Barbara Jean Powell, Win Everham, Curt Witthoff. **Not Present:** Laurie Macdonald.

BICY Staff Present: Pedro Ramos, David Hamm, Dennis Bartalino, Adam Sandy, Ed Clark, Mary Jo Shreffler, Ron Clark, Steve Schulze, Bob DeGross, Jill Wilson, Damon Doumlele, Susan Rossi.

There were twelve members of the public present.

The meeting was facilitated by Delia Clark.

Mr. Ramos welcomed the Committee and led the Pledge of Allegiance. He welcomed the newest member of the Committee, Collier County Commissioner Jim Coletta.

Ms. Clark reviewed the agenda and explained how the meeting will run.

Superintendent's Report. Mr. Ramos announced that six members' terms were expiring, but that five of the six had agreed to serve another term. Their names have been forwarded to the Department of the Interior for reappointment. The sixth, Marsha Connell, decided not to renew her membership, and Mr. Ramos thanked her for her service. Two other nominations were pending. When these names have been accepted, they and Mr. Coletta will be scheduled for training.

There was an outstanding issue of adding the Addition Lands to the scope of the Committee. The charter cannot be amended to do this, but BICY was awaiting guidance from Washington. The work that lies ahead on the ORV trail network for the Addition will not be ready for the Committee until later this year or next year.

Law requires development of two I-75 ORV access points, which will be at MM51 and MM63. BICY is working with its partners on the MM51 access point. FDOT expects to break ground later this year or early next year.

BICY is working on a Hunting Management Plan with the Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission. There have been some delays on the contract for the Environmental Assessment, but there may be a resolution soon.

A Notice of Intent to Sue related to the Addition GMP has already been issued by several environmental groups, including PEER. This potential lawsuit may delay some of the trail work BICY is doing in the Addition.

A scoping meeting for the access points EA for the original Preserve was held a few months ago. There are three access points in particular for which BICY needs Committee input. Dennis Bartalino will give a presentation later in the meeting.

The implementation goal right now is to completely eliminate dispersed use, particularly in the Corn Dance Unit, by this summer. This is the number one priority and has been a primary goal of the ORV Management Plan.

Approval of Minutes. Ms. Clark stated that the minutes were not available for approval, as Barbara Jean Powell had been sick and was unable to complete them before this meeting.

Mr. Ramos explained to the Committee that the recording of the minutes over the last three years has been very difficult. Although the Committee wants verbatim minutes, this has been a huge undertaking. The NPS does not require verbatim minutes. Rather, minutes should track the agenda topic by topic, highlighting the main discussion, and recording any action items for a future agenda.

The last several meetings have been videotaped, and this will continue. These records will be kept for future reference. Damon Doumlele and Susan Rossi will work together to take brief minutes. This will allow minutes to be completed in a more timely fashion and placed on the PEPC website sooner for public viewing. The Committee is welcome to continue with verbatim notes, but the NPS cannot support it.

The Committee agreed with the shortened form of the minutes as long as video recordings were available and placed on the web, if possible. Ms. Powell agreed to continue preparing written notes of each meeting.

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Backcountry Volunteer Program. Jill Wilson, Park Ranger, gave the following highlights of this program:

- Using ORVs in the backcountry to promote safety
- Promotes land stewardship
- Trail maintenance
- Give back important data to the Preserve
- Promoted the program in October 2010 and received over 45 applications
- The first tier of the program produced a core group of 12 – 14 volunteers
- Now going into a second tier

Mary Jo Shreffler, Park Ranger, gave the following program update:

- Trail Maintenance
 - >Assisting several divisions within the Preserve
 - >Replacing trail markers
 - >Trash pick-up
- Secondary Trail Assessments
 - >Follow behind maintenance crew; has assessed 23 trails in Turner River Unit
 - >Base camp at Monroe Station
- Report on illegal off-trail travel
- Remove tree stands and tent camps
- Assess clearly marked trail terminuses
- Helped with the Cal Stone project

Public Comment. Lyle McCandless was concerned that once a program gets put into place it never goes away and felt that this program is not conducive to Big Cypress. He was concerned about the cost of the program. Ms. Powell responded that a volunteer program was his idea, which he denied.

Frank Denninger said he heard nothing about cultural resources in the presentation. The volunteers should be picking up trash and should not be approaching anyone in the field.

Shannen Larsen said she was disappointed that no Aboriginal People were on the Committee and that the NPS needed to contact the Aboriginal People about burial grounds. Win Everham responded that Native Americans were represented on the Committee by Ed Woods, who has since resigned his position.

Ms. Shreffler explained that there is no cost to the federal government for this program. It is funded by a grant from the South Florida National Parks Trust for \$15,000. Initially, there were

many hours spent setting up this program, but now it only requires 2 to 4 hours per week to maintain. The volunteers do pick up trash such as cans, bottles, and food wrappers. So far they have served 863 hours.

Access Point and Turn Lane Development. Dennis Bartalino, Chief of Facilities Management, gave a presentation on the status of this project. BICY held a public scoping meeting recently, and the project is now in the pre-design phase. The EA should be completed sometime this summer. Concho Billie will not be part of the EA. The eight ORV access points to be developed are Turner River Road North, Windmill Tram, Skillet Strand North/South, Monroe Station, Sig Walker, Pace's Dike, and Boundary Line. Turn lanes would be located at Turner River Road, Burns Road, Skillet Strand, Monroe Station and Oasis. Improvements at trailhead locations would include aggregate parking surface for trailer and/or auto parking, single vault toilets, refuse containers, information boards, signage, gates, backcountry permit stations, sodding, and/or planting.

Mr. Bartalino asked the Committee how much development they felt was necessary at the access points. Karl Greer felt that parking is at a premium at Monroe Station and asked if there could be parking inside the fence with lighting. Mr. Bartalino indicated that there will be slight improvement to the southwest area, but there are plans for a full rehabilitation of Monroe Station, with offices on the second floor.

Mr. Ramos said he wanted to hear from the Committee regarding parking on Turner River Road, because it would involve wetlands. Franklin Adams wanted it kept simple and said that Concho Billie works fine. He said that eight access points are okay and wanted to leave everything else as is other than Oasis and Monroe Station. He was opposed to any other improvements.

Dr. Everham asked if there would be toilet facilities at all locations. Mr. Ramos replied that the GMP says Monroe Station only.

John Adornato said there is not enough parking if people are parking on the side of the road. This becomes a welfare and safety issue. Toilets are a good idea in general. Trash bins and recycle bins are needed at these locations.

Mr. Greer felt that toilets should not be that big of an issue. There are toilets at Kirby Storter, Oasis, and at Turner River Road and U.S. 41.

Wayne Jenkins was in favor of primitive parking. He asked why the toilet at Monroe Station was locked and was told that there is a portable toilet there.

The greatest concern of the Committee was loss of access. There need to be provisions for overflow parking.

Public Comment. Shannen Larsen said that less is more. She was opposed to filling of any wetlands. If left alone, the water and the birds will return.

Frank Denninger was against designated parking because it will wipe out foot hunting.

Lyle McCandless would like to drive through the gate at Concho Billie and keep vehicles protected. The NPS should widen the road at the gate. Overflow on Turner River Road should not be eliminated.

Corn Dance and Zones 2 and 3 Unit Trail Network Planning. Bob DeGross, Chief of Interpretation, said that the subcommittees had recommended 69 miles of primary trails, 78½ miles of secondary trails, and 5 miles of trails to private camps. Within the next few weeks, BICY will start groundtruthing in this area.

Public Comment. Frank Denninger did not agree that this issue is done, and it should not go to the full Committee because the subcommittee may need another meeting.

Charles Barley is a member of the Corn Dance Subcommittee. He said that he has been trying to make a workable trail system and asked that the Committee press the NPS to work with the subcommittee to give them time to work this out.

Lyle McCandless disagreed with the NPS setting number of miles of trails at 400. He felt this was a tainted process.

David Nash said that the trail going to his camp has been changed four times already. He asked that it not be changed again, or that the NPS should at least work with him. He wanted to know if the trails were set in stone or if they could be moved again.

Bobby Billie did not want any more roads built; they damage life and endangered species.

Cecil Osceola did not want anything built anymore. He did not want the footprint of the Big Cypress changed. It is there for hunting and fishing.

Shannen Larsen said the public was not being provided with accurate information by the NPS as to the number of wetlands that currently exist within BICY. She felt that habitats are being destroyed and said that no one contacted Bobby Billie or Cecil Osceola concerning sacred burial grounds.

Steve McCutcheon wanted access to the general area and felt that it would be a mistake to bring in fill.

Bill Clark asked what the buffer zone was. He also had an issue with the closed Yellow Trail in Bear Island.

The Committee agreed that to accept this plan in concept with the understanding that when issues arise they will be looked at and dealt with at that time. Mr. Ramos stated that he was looking for a recommendation that the Committee believed BICY should accept and start working with. He added that, as with the Turner River Unit, there will be plenty of opportunities for adjustments as the Preserve moves forward.

General Public Comment. Bobby Billie said this whole area is sacred land to his people. He will continue to speak for his people against any new buildings or roads.

Shannen Larson was disappointed that Turner River was not discussed. She would like someone to notify Bobby Billie when Turner River is on the agenda. She was told it would be on June's agenda. She also spoke about parking issues and said that Loop Road is sacred to the tribe.

Committee Open Discussion, Wrap-up, and Proposals for Agenda for Next Meeting. Mr. Jenkins indicated that when the trails reopen from the summer closure, there will be new trails. He requested new maps be available by then. He asked if two-wheel buggies were banned in the Preserve and was told no.

Dr. Everham thought the Committee needed to have conversations about the nature of adaptive management.

“To Do” List for Next Meeting:

- *Investigate the availability of video records
- *How many hours for the Backcountry Volunteer Program?
- *Inform everyone of the next meeting date

Mr. Ramos thanked the Committee for their hard work.

The meeting adjourned at 8:15 p.m.